

'Oh, look. See Spot run . . .'

## More ways to teach reading join Dick, Jane, Sally

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Remember when you first began reading in school? How Jane told Dick to, "Look, Dick, look. See Spot?"

Well, things have changed somewhat since Dick and Jane monopolized beginning reading. Oh, they're still around, but more and different methods of teaching reading are being used now in Lincoln's public elementary schools.

One of the more innovative approaches to teaching reading in the first grade, from the standpoint of what most people are familiar with, is the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA).

First developed by Sir James Pitman and introduced into British schools in 1961, the ITA came to the United States in 1962.

The ITA method is found in only one Lincoln school, Randolph, where it has been used for five years.

ITA changes the 26-letter alphabet into 44 characters, with each character representing each sound in English.

ITA is used only in the beginning stages of reading, after which a child, having mastered the ITA, transfers to the conventional alphabet.

Some arguments against ITA say the transition is too difficult for a child to make.

But Mrs. Madelyn Palmer, an ITA teacher at Randolph, disagrees. "I was amazed how easily they made the transition," she said. "I've taught the other methods for 17 years, and I'm sold on ITA."

The language-experience approach, one in which a child learns to read what he says, is another relatively non-traditional method used in beginning reading. It is used to some extent in most of the Lincoln elementary schools.

It is the main approach to teaching reading in the federally-funded Follow Through program, a continuation of the Head Start program for educationally and economically deprived pre-schoolers.

In one example of language-experience learning a child tells of an experience, or simply makes up a story, and the teacher writes down everything he says in the way he says it. Then the child learns to read what he said.

Perhaps the least tradition approach is individualized reading, in which a child works independently, though still under the watchful eyes of the teacher.

An important part of the individualized approach is the individual conference the child has with the teacher.

Periodically the teacher and child discuss what he has read, and the teacher makes suggestions and helps answer any questions the child may have.

The child reads orally to the teacher so that the teacher can measure his progress. The teacher then recommends more books the child might enjoy reading.

Though most of the Lincoln public schools use some individualized reading along with other approaches, no school uses individualized reading exclusively or even predominantly.

And some of the more traditional teachers shun it entirely, doubting its practicality.

Another new approach to reading, known as linguistics, has made some inroads into Lincoln schools, though it is not used widely.

The linguistics approach presents a controlled group of words, usually unrelated, having a similar sound. An example is words with "at" in them: cat, mat, fat, bat.

Sentences are constructed using these similar sounds, such as: "A fat cat ran at a bad rat."



Sometimes they're in groups, sometimes they're alone; sometimes they're tracing letters, sometimes they're sounding out words. Children in the Lincoln Public Schools

are finding that learning to read can take many forms. One child in Mrs. Madelyn Palmer's class at Randolph School practices reading aloud to a teacher aide.

Another reading approach, the Orton-Gillingham-Stillman method (usually shortened to Orton-Gillingham), is being used to some degree by most of the Lincoln elementary schools.

It is a phonics approach for children with learning disabilities, and it emphasizes use of all the senses.

For example, children write letters in sand trays and trace over letters covered with hardened glue on flashcards. This attempts to give them a greater physical awareness of reading.

Like the overwhelming majority of school systems in the country, the Lincoln Public Schools reading program is based on basal readers.

The Scott-Foresman reader series is the most frequently used. These are the familiar Dick, Jane, Spot and Puff readers that many people seem to remember going through at one time or another.

Basal reading uses a "sight method," or word memorization. After beginning reading this way, phonics then are introduced.

A typical example of a class using basal readers can be found in a first grade class at Hawthorne School.

The teacher, Mrs. Alice Leininger, has the class divided into several groups of four or five children, with one group reading out of the basals while the rest of the class does a related activity, such as writing in their workbooks.

Each group sits in a rough semi-circle either on chairs or on the floor.

The children read silently over some of the material and then take turns reading aloud.

Throughout these exercises, Mrs. Leininger asks the meaning of what the pupils have read so that they are not performing simply the mechanics of reading.

After completing the material for the day, one group returns to another activity, usually workbooks, and another group organizes for reading.

Basal materials usually begin with preprimers for beginning children and progress to primers and readers. Along the way, workbooks that parallel the readers are used.

The basals are systematic and deliberate in their procedures, and critics often call them boring.

Basal readers also have been criticized as unrealistic in their portrayal of life. Nearly always, they show white,

middle-class, suburban family scenes.

Only recently has the Scott-Foresman series shifted to a multi-ethnic format. However, the same family situations and activities are portrayed in the newer series.

The basals also are written in a way that critics say children don't talk. An example: Jane says something like, "Look, Spot, look. Look, look, look."

For those children who are able readers and who can move faster than the basal readers' pace, there are Wide Horizons Readers.

Teachers do not rely solely on basal readers and workbooks. They bring in supplementary reading, and they play games and records designed to improve the child's reading.

Each teacher has her own way of using the basal series. Most schools using basal readers use the Scott-Foresman series, the MacMillan series or both.

Two Lincoln schools, Belmont and Morley, use a series put out by the Economy Company, and the method of teaching is known as the economy approach.

Whereas most basal readers emphasize word memorization, or sight reading, the economy approach emphasizes phonics.

Six elementary schools in Lincoln are participating in a federally-funded program called Project INSTRUCT (Instructional System for Teaching Reading Using Continuous Progress Technology). They are Belmont, Calvert, Eastridge, Hartley, McPhee and West Lincoln.

Project INSTRUCT is a systems approach to reading. It combines teaching pre-reading skills, like knowing different sounds, and teaching complex word perception skills, such as placing accent marks on words, usually taught to children aged 9 and 10.

These skills are arranged into groups and are taught in sequence from easy to more difficult. When a child masters a certain group of skills, he then moves on to a more difficult group.

Children are tested upon entering the program and are categorized according to their knowledge of reading skills. Groups of children then are formed based on skills not yet mastered.

At three-week intervals, new groups are organized. Having mastered one set of skills, the child is tested to see if he should proceed to the next group. Those who do not pass the skills at the end of the three week repeat the unit.

But different approaches are attempted by the teacher to reach the child who did not respond well to the first approach.

The one thing teachers, principals and administrators agree upon is that there is no one best approach to teaching reading.

Superintendent John Prash said the Lincoln schools are trying to "find the system that best fits the child, rather than find one for all children."

Dr. Mildred Alexis, reading specialist and a teacher for 34 years, said, "Reading is an individual thing. If one method doesn't work for a child, you try another approach."

Principal Jerry Oehring of Elliott School said, "No classroom (in Elliott) works exclusively in one approach. I think this is the only way it can be."

Oehring summarized the reason for using many methods to teach reading.

"You just can't put a kid in a box," he said, by trying to have all children learn by the same method. That's why many different approaches must be used, he said.

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